

THE AMERICA'S COLLEGE PROMISE PLAYBOOK

**Expanding the Promise of a College Education and
Economic Opportunity for All Students**



U.S. Department of Education

September 2016

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Background

Completing higher education can provide invaluable benefits to society and students that last throughout their lives. Decades of research have shown large returns to higher education in terms of labor market earnings, health, and happiness. In addition, the jobs of the future will require higher skill levels: over the next decade, the number of jobs requiring some level of higher education is expected to grow more rapidly than those that do not, with 11 of the 15 fastest-growing occupations requiring postsecondary education.¹ Today, more than ever, Americans need knowledge and skills to meet the demands of a growing global economy and serve their communities without having to take on decades of debt before they even embark on a career.

America's more than 1,300 community colleges² have the unique capacity to serve these needs, as they provide over 40 percent of—or roughly 7 million—undergraduates with opportunities to deepen their knowledge, become more informed citizens, and earn quality, affordable degrees or credentials that prepare students for the demands of a competitive global economy. According to one recent study, community college graduates have an easier time finding a job and make an average of \$10,000 more a year than those with just a high school diploma; these earnings gains hold true regardless of their ages.³

Community college students also reflect America's diverse population, including many older, low- or moderate-income, racial and ethnic minority, first-generation, and rural Americans, which are some of the fastest growing segments of the population.

That's why President Obama unveiled his America's College Promise (ACP) plan in January 2015 to make two years of community college free for responsible students, letting students earn the first half of a bachelor's degree and learn skills needed to succeed in the workforce at no cost. As a first-dollar scholarship, the President's ACP plan would bring in federal and state investments to cover tuition and fees, which allows students to apply any additional federal, state, institutional, and private financial aid to cover the remaining and the bulk of their cost of attendance, which include expenses like academic supplies, transportation, room and board, and child care.⁴

In fewer than two years since the President challenged more states and communities to make America's College Promise a reality for their students, at least 36 Promise programs—free community college programs—have launched in states, cities, and community colleges in all corners of the United States, increasing the total estimated number of Promise programs to more than 150 across the country. Altogether these new programs are raising more than \$150 million in new public and private investments in community colleges to serve at least 180,000 students; and the number of free community college programs continues to grow.⁵

These new, free community college programs build on the Obama Administration's record of investing in students and the local economy. The Administration has invested more than \$70 billion in support of community colleges, including over \$66 billion for more than 19 million Pell Grants to help students and

¹ Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections. United States Department of Labor. *Employment Projections: 2014-24 Summary*. BLS.gov. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 8 Dec. 2015. Web. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.nr0.htm>.

² College Scorecard Data.

³ Anthony Carnevale, Stephen Rose, and Ban Cheah. "The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime Earnings." *The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce* (2011): 4. Louis Jacobson, Robert J. Lalonde, and Daniel Sullivan. "The Impact of Community College Retraining on Older Displaced Workers: Should We Teach Old Dogs New Tricks?" *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 58.3 (2005). Print.

⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/09/fact-sheet-white-house-unveils-america-s-college-promise-proposal-tuition>

⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/25/fact-sheet-white-house-launches-new-100-million-competition-expand>

families pay for college; as well as \$2 billion at nearly half of the nation's community colleges in Job-Driven Training Community College Grants that seek to strengthen education and training programs that lead to in-demand employment and provide a ticket to the middle class. These funds build upon the \$1.6 billion in programs under Title III and Title V of the Higher Education Act (HEA) to strengthen the capacity of all institutions (including Historically Black Colleges and Universities and minority-serving institutions) to provide students an affordable, high-quality education. These critical investments have helped transform the role of community colleges as leading providers of high-quality, affordable pathways for obtaining the skills and knowledge sought by employers.⁶

The terms “free” and “College Promise” can relay simple, powerful, and clear messages, suggesting to students that a college opportunity can be available and affordable to them if they work hard. School and policy leaders have noted that in communities with free community college programs, many students’ and families’ questions about college have shifted from “*Is college possible?*” to “*Which college is right for my goals?*” Evidence suggests that some of students’ most common college choices are between going to college or not;⁷ community colleges offer an affordable education for many students who may have otherwise not attended college or who may have chosen to attend a more expensive or lower quality college. Overall, the data show that Promise programs are making a positive impact. Studies of free community college and scholarship programs show that they have increased students’ access to financial aid and increased rates of high school graduation, college enrollment, and college graduation, particularly for low-income and first-generation students.^{8, 9, 10}

Purpose of the College Promise Playbook

The effectiveness of future programs and their designs highly depend on access to reliable evidence and best practices. The purpose of this College Promise Playbook is to connect practitioners with relevant and actionable information that will allow them to offer more students access to an affordable, high-quality education where they can go as far as their talents, work ethic, and dreams can take them. Communities can use this Playbook to develop programs that 1) expand college access for hard-working students through tuition-free community college, 2) strengthen and reform the community college experience to promote gains in student enrollment, persistence, completion and/or transfer with subsequent completion at a four-year institution, and employment, and 3) prepare students for continued education and/or high-demand, middle-class jobs. This Playbook provides program design elements from ACP and other common features of free community college programs that other communities can adopt and personalize as appropriate.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ J. E. Brand, F. T. Pfeffer, and S. Goldrick-Rab. *Interpreting community college effects in the presence of heterogeneity and complex counterfactuals*. California Center for Population Research, University of California, Los Angeles. 2012. <http://papers.ccpr.ucla.edu/papers/PWP-CCPR-2012-004/PWP-CCPR-2012-004.pdf> (accessed June 2013); A. Chung. “The choice of for-profit college.” *Economics of Education Review*, 31(6), 1084–1101. 2012; N. Hillman, and T. Weichman. *Education deserts: The continued significance of “place” in the twenty-first century* (Viewpoints: Voices from the Field). 2016. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

⁸ Timothy J. Bartik, Brad J. Hershbein, and Marta Lachowska. *The Effects of the Kalamazoo Promise Scholarship on College Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion*. Rep. Upjohn Institute, n.d. Web. http://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1246&context=up_workingpapers; Celeste K. Carruthers, and William F. Fox. *Aid for All: College Coaching, Financial Aid, and Post-secondary Persistence in Tennessee*. Rep. Elsevier Ltd., April 2016. Web. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272775715000771>; Timothy J. Bartik, and Marta Lachowska. “The short-term effects of the Kalamazoo Promise Scholarship on student outcomes.” *Research in Labor Economics*, 38: 37-76. 2013.

⁹ Timothy J. Bartik, Brad J. Hershbein, and Marta Lachowska. *The Effects of the Kalamazoo Promise Scholarship on College Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion*. Rep. Upjohn Institute, n.d. Web. http://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1246&context=up_workingpapers; Celeste K. Carruthers, and William F. Fox. *Aid for All: College Coaching, Financial Aid, and Post-secondary Persistence in Tennessee*. Rep. Elsevier Ltd., April 2016. Web. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272775715000771>.

¹⁰ Lindsay C. Page, Benjamin L. Castleman, and Gumilang A. Sahadewo. *More than Dollars for Scholars: The Impact of the Dell Scholars Program on College Access, Persistence and Degree Attainment*. Rep. Social Science Research Network, February 1, 2016. Web. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2726320.

Key Steps in Launching a Promise Program

Communities have identified the following steps as some of the key considerations that enabled them to develop and launch a free community college program.

1. Identify community needs and opportunities
2. Build a team and develop partnerships to strengthen educational quality
3. Design a high-quality program that serves the community's and students' needs
4. Develop a sustainable funding model
5. Evaluate and assess program effectiveness to learn what works for continuous improvement

1. Identify Community Needs and Opportunities

Today, 90 percent of the population lives within 25 miles of a community college.¹¹ Successful Promise programs tend to demonstrate effective use of a grass-roots and community-led effort to design tailored programs to meet the specific needs and strengths of their communities and students. While programs may have design variations, such as the target population, the academic eligibility criteria, or the scholarship length, many programs share a common vision of increasing educational access and success for students, which can boost economic development and strengthen their local communities.

For students and adults alike, particularly those who might not have otherwise considered higher education, these programs can also foster a college-going culture. Students learn, especially early in their education, that support will be available for their pursuit of higher education; and when students and families have an early understanding that college is possible, they can better prepare academically and financially. When students orient their expectations towards college, they can also have more time to explore the resources and information available to ensure that they find a good-value college where they can succeed if they work hard.

Expanding access to community colleges may also benefit the local community by providing an alternative to more expensive or lower-quality schools. Although for-profit institutions often offer similar degree programs, on average, students at community colleges tend to have better employment outcomes, lower rates of student loan defaults, and higher rates of satisfaction with their courses.¹² In particular, students receiving certificates from for-profit institutions generally pay higher costs for attendance, but earn less than comparable students would in community colleges.¹³ Some students who would otherwise attend a for-profit school might instead attend a community college and see better outcomes as a result. In addition, negative impacts on those who attend higher quality four-year colleges are likely to be limited. Community colleges tend to be less of a substitute for four-year degrees, especially those at more selective institutions, limiting the likelihood of Promise programs incentivizing students to attend lower quality colleges. In fact, one study in Texas shows that lower community college tuition does not impact enrollment at public four-year universities, but instead increased transfers from community colleges to universities and increased the probability of earning a bachelor's degree.¹⁴

¹¹ National Governors' Association Center for Best Practices, 2014. "Using Community Colleges to Build a STEM-Skilled Workforce." <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED522079.pdf>.

¹² Stephanie Riegg Cellini, and Nicholas Turner. *Gainfully Employed? Assessing the Employment and Earnings of For-Profit College Students Using Administrative Data*. Working paper no. 22287. N.p.: NBER, 2016. Print. Community College Research Center. *What We Know About Dual Enrollment*. Teachers College, Columbia University. 2012. Web. <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/dual-enrollment-research-overview.pdf>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jeffrey T. Denning. *College on the Cheap: Consequences of Community College Tuition Reductions*. Working paper. American Economic Journal, n.d. Web. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20150374&&from=f>.

Increased numbers of students accessing a college education and earning their degrees and credentials locally can strengthen the community's workforce, increase demand for local goods and services, and increase investments in local infrastructure, as well as offer other intangible benefits like community members' feeling of inclusion and safety. Studies show that Promise programs, particularly those offering pathways to bachelor's degrees, can be a key strategy in supporting local economic development, and have increased the number of people staying in their communities.¹⁵

2. Build a Team and Develop Partnerships to Strengthen Educational Quality

Funding alone will not address all needs; everyone plays a role in improving student success:

- Policymakers at all levels of government (e.g., federal, state, and local) can provide resources to support students' progress towards graduation, and facilitate coordination between schools and communities.
- Schools, colleges, and universities can provide a rigorous academic experience and provide support to ensure students are expanding their knowledge and skillset, and that they are able to make informed college decisions. Partnerships among K-12 schools, community colleges, and four-year colleges are critical to ensuring that students are well-prepared and that credits transfer to make progress on their degrees.
- Employers can invest in the knowledge and skills of their future teams by sharing facilities and resources, offering professional experiences to supplement students' academic experience, and supporting course design to ensure the curriculum is relevant to students' career goals.
- Community-based organizations can promote college access and success by providing advising, counseling, and resources to students and families.
- Foundations and investors can make the investments needed to strengthen college readiness, student outcomes, and college performance, among other factors that drive success in education.
- Students can work hard and take full advantage of their educational opportunities.

Community colleges serve students in various stages of their college and career aspirations, which reinforces the importance of having strong partnerships across the K-12 schools, higher education institutions, and employers:

- College Preparation : Community colleges may be the first ones to open the doors to college for students, as they provide over 70 percent of all dual enrollment courses.¹⁶ Dual enrollment, early college high schools, and other college-credit programs, have consistently increased student achievement, including better grades for participating students, higher college enrollment rates, and increased college completion rates.¹⁷ Additionally, community colleges provide developmental educational opportunities for students at lower costs than other institutions, allowing them to prepare to earn a degree.

¹⁵ Timothy J. Bartik, and Nathan Sotherland. 2015. "Migration and Housing Price Effects of Place-Based College Scholarships." Upjohn Institute Working Paper 15-245. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17848/wp15-245>.

¹⁶ Stephanie Marken, Lucinda Gray, and Laurie Lewis. *Dual Enrollment Programs and Courses for High School Students at Postsecondary Institutions: 2010–11*. Rep. National Center for Education Statistics, February 2013. Web. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013002.pdf>.

¹⁷ American Institutes for Research & SRI. (2013). *Early college, early success: Early College High School Initiative impact study*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from <http://www.air.org>. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/singlestudyreview.aspx?sid=20006>; B. P. An. "The impact of dual enrollment on college degree attainment: Do low-SES students benefit?" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 35 (2012): 57–75. Web. <http://epa.sagepub.com/content/35/1/57>; *What we know about dual enrollment*. New York, NY: Community College Research Center. 2012.

- **College Education with Transfer Opportunities:** Charging an average of \$3,000 per year for tuition and fees, community colleges may be an attractive starting point for students who want an affordable pathway to a bachelor's degree.¹⁸ Over 80 percent of community college students say that they intend to transfer to complete a four-year degree.¹⁹ Promise programs would make tuition free for students—an even better bargain. Community colleges award roughly two-thirds of all associate degrees and account for over 40 percent of undergraduate enrollment,²⁰ so when they provide high-quality academic experiences, and have robust transfer and articulation agreements, community colleges can ensure students are accessing a rigorous education that can prepare them for their educational and career goals.
- **Career Pathways:** Community colleges are also uniquely positioned to partner with employers to create training programs that are relevant to the economic needs of their community or to assist older workers who need new skills. Most states are implementing sectoral training strategies based on partnerships between government, education, workforce groups, and employers, among others, to focus on the needs of a regional labor market need.²¹ These strategies often address knowledge and skills gaps and align state and local employment programs and resources, and community colleges play a central role in their success.

With the vast number of students that community colleges serve at all points of their education and their central role in any community, it becomes increasingly important to ensure that community colleges provide a rigorous educational opportunity for students to succeed if they work hard. Through stronger partnerships and new resources, community colleges can not only open more doors for college access, but also deepen students' pathways towards graduation and employment.

- **Key Reforms Needed for Student Success:** Students are more likely to make academic progress and complete college if they receive support obtaining financial aid, explore and have early professional exposure and experiences, choose a program of study, and develop an academic plan based on program maps created by faculty, employers, and advisors.
- **Structured Academic Pathways:** Studies show that clearer academic structures around the degree requirements and credit accumulation, coupled with early enrollment in a program of study, can lead to higher rates of completion. Preliminary results from colleges that have implemented guided pathways reforms are also encouraging; students are more likely to earn their degrees if they are able to identify a road map of the courses they need to take, receive advising and support along the way, and have the opportunity to learn in rigorous courses that are relevant to the students' career and educational goals.²² This vision often requires faculty to be at the center of sustained, college-wide efforts to improve student success.²³
- **Comprehensive Student Supports:** Studies show that programs including well-structured student supports services and resources, tuition waivers, academic, financial, and career advising, and transportation and textbook subsidies, as demonstrated by the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (CUNY ASAP), have altogether more than doubled students' likelihood of earning a college degree. These reforms were originally made possible with a \$5,500 increase in per-student expenditure, but over a few years and with experience, the

¹⁸ Table 330.10 on Average Undergraduate Tuition and Fees. NCES. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_330.10.asp.

¹⁹ Bailey et al. What We Know About Transfer. Community College Research Center. 2015.

<http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/what-we-know-about-transfer.pdf>.

²⁰ https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_321.12.asp?current=yes and

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_318.10.asp?current=yes

²¹ L. Woolsey, and G. Groves. State Sector Strategies Coming of Age: Implications for State Workforce Policy Makers. 2013.

²² What We Know About Guided Pathways. Rep. Community College Research Center, n.d. Web.

<http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/What-We-Know-Guided-Pathways.pdf>.

²³ <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/the-new-forgotten-half-and-research-directions-to-support-them.pdf>

program was able to reduce the additional per-student expenditure to only \$3,700 while continuing to achieve high student outcomes.^{24, 25}

- **Stronger or New Partnerships for Funding and Resources:** Community colleges often face challenges in increasing their funding and resources in order to implement the types of reforms that strengthen their academic programs and increase student success. While selective four-year schools enroll one low-income student for every 14 high-income students, community colleges enroll two low-income students for every high-income student.²⁶ However, community colleges receive less revenue per full-time equivalent student than institutions in any of the other sectors.²⁷ Unlike four-year institutions, community colleges have less flexibility to increase tuition to cover the costs of educating students, even without the private gifts, investment income, and endowment earnings of many four-year schools; and they tend to charge far lower tuition. Offering educational programs that are in high-demand fields—such as information technology, data analytics, health care, and manufacturing—often requires up-front and regular investments in up-to-date equipment and highly-skilled instructors (i.e., curriculum design, instructor training, and supplies), both of which can be a challenge for underfunded community colleges. Employers can help fill this gap, since local businesses have experts, equipment, resources, and training facilities that can be shared with the college to make community college curricula more rigorous and relevant.²⁸ Community college programs can be high-quality and effective when stakeholders—from K-12 schools to policymakers to foundations to community residents—come together to invest time, energy, and resources into the educational opportunity that can enrich their communities and economy.²⁹

3. Design a High-Quality Program that Serves the Community's and Students' Needs

The driving motivation behind free community college programs is often to expand college access and success as universally as possible to hard-working students. However, most stakeholders implementing these programs face real constraints and need to incorporate program design provisions that allow limited resources to create the best outcomes for students. Design features can promote better outcomes by creating positive incentives for students, directing dollars to those most in need, and by funding programs that demonstrate a commitment to a high quality education. Still, every beneficial design feature has associated trade-offs, and the precise provisions included in a specific program are likely to depend on community needs and constraints.

Many of the program design features shown below are included in ACP and most of the recently announced Promise programs. Those interested in developing community college programs and policies

²⁴ S. Scrivener, et al. *Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for Developmental Education Students*. MDRC, February 2015.

²⁵ H. Levin, and E. Garcia. *Cost-Effectiveness of Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) of the City University of New York (CUNY)*. Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, September 2009.

²⁶ Sandy Baum, and Charles Kurose. *Community Colleges in Context: Exploring Financing of Two- and Four-Year Institutions*. Rep. The Century Foundation, 2013. Web. https://tcf.org/assets/downloads/20130523-Bridging_the_Higher_Education_Divide-Baum_Kurose.pdf.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Louis Soares. *The Power of the Education-Industry Partnership: Fostering Innovation in Collaboration Between Community Colleges and Businesses*. Issue brief. Center for American Progress, October 2010. Web.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/labor/report/2010/10/04/8518/the-power-of-the-education-industry-partnership/>.

²⁹ Henry M. Levin, and Emma Garcia. *Benefit-Cost Analysis of Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) of the City University of New York (CUNY)*. Rep. Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, May 2013. Web.

http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/Levin_ASAP_Benefit_Cost_Report_FINAL_05212013.pdf; Susan Scrivener, et al. *Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for Developmental Education Students*. Rep. MDRC, Feb. 2015. Web. http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/doubling_graduation_rates_fr.pdf.

are encouraged to consider integrating these features, and adapting them to fit the needs of their communities. Programs that maintain a simple and transparent face to students and families are likely to have the greatest positive impact on students' college preparation and understanding of financial aid.³⁰

Student Eligibility May Include These Provisions:

- Based on community needs and program capacity, Promise programs may consider prioritizing recent high school graduates or focusing on adult learners.

About 60 percent of community college students enroll within one year of graduating from high school.³¹ Research shows that students with less time between high school graduation and college enrollment are more likely to complete college.³² Programs may consider building in eligibility requirements—such as being a recent high school graduate—to encourage students to complete high school and reduce the time between high school and college. However, it is important to note that the average community college student is 28 years old, and while many adult learners attend community colleges, a disproportionate share attend for-profit institutions.³³ To ensure that programs do not exclude adult learners who may stand to benefit from participation, programs may wish to include provisions to encourage enrollment or develop more tailored programs for adult learners who want to up-skill, return to school to complete degrees, and/or earn their degrees while working.

- Provide two years of eligibility in the program. Encourage full-time enrollment, or half-time at minimum, and maintain progress on credit accumulation that would keep students on track to graduate on time.

Research shows that enrollment intensity can be one of the greatest predictors of on-time completion. Today, most community college students enroll part-time in order to ensure they can continue to work and fulfill other personal responsibilities.³⁴ While programs should be designed to be responsive to students' needs, programs should also ensure not to compromise efforts to ensure hard-working students complete their degrees.

Research shows that enrolling full time, which is often defined as 12 credits, can increase credit accumulation and transfer rates.³⁵ Note that if students enroll in 12 credits each semester, it would take them about 2 and a half years to complete the standard 60 credits for an associate degree. If programs have the resources, they may offer the scholarship for three years to provide more flexibility to students, particularly if the majority of students enroll part-time. Communities can consider providing the scholarship for two years, which may set a higher expectation to complete on time and encourage more students to accumulate more credits to do so.

³⁰ Laura Perna, and Patricia Steele. "The Role of Context in Understanding the Contributions of Financial Aid to College Opportunity." Teachers College Record, Vol. 113, Num. 5. May 2011.

³¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Survey, 2012.

³² D. Shapiro, et al. *Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates – Fall 2009 Cohort*. Rep. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, November 2015. Web. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SignatureReport10.pdf>; Laura Horn, Emily Forrest Cataldi, and Anna Sikora. *Waiting To Attend College: Undergraduates Who Delay Their Postsecondary Enrollment*. Rep. National Center for Education Statistics, June 2005. Web. <http://nces.ed.gov/das/epubs/2005152/>; Sunny Niu, and Marta Tienda. *Delayed Enrollment and College Plans: Is There a Postponement Penalty?* Rep. National Institutes of Health, January 2013. Web. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3627725/>.

³³ Adam Looney, and Constantine Yannelis. *A crisis in student loans? How changes in the characteristics of borrowers and in the institutions they attended contributed to rising loan defaults*. Brookings Institution. September 2015. <https://www.brookings.edu/bpea-articles/a-crisis-in-student-loans-how-changes-in-the-characteristics-of-borrowers-and-in-the-institutions-they-attended-contributed-to-rising-loan-defaults/>.

³⁴ NPSAS 2012.

³⁵ Toby Park. *The Impact of Full Time Enrollment in the First Semester on Community College Transfer Rates: New Evidence from Texas With Pre-College Determinants*. Rep. Teachers College Record, 2014. Web.

A study shows that students who enroll with 15 credits are more likely to complete the standard 60-credit associate degree on time, particularly if they maintain the momentum on credit accumulation throughout their first year.³⁶ If resources allow, one strategy can be to provide more scholarship dollars for enrolling in more credits. Designs to accelerate progress towards completion can ensure more students succeed while optimizing programs' limited resources, especially when research does not confidently show that enrolling in school longer increases the likelihood of completing. By offering greater financial support and stronger student supports like career advising and child care support, programs can relieve—rather than add more—financial burden for students who want to take more credits to complete their degrees faster.

- Maintain a minimum GPA in college. The ACP proposal would designate a 2.5 GPA. Programs can set GPA requirements based on community needs and available resources.

To remain eligible for financial aid, many colleges require students to maintain at least a 2.0 GPA to meet the Satisfactory Academic Progress after two years.³⁷ Research shows that a scholarship designed to help students with their expenses and incent good academic progress—by requiring students to earn a minimum GPA—increased the likelihood of credit accumulation, academic progress, persistence, and completion.^{38, 39, 40} Importantly, studies also show that students were less likely to maintain their GPAs in the final year of college, when their GPAs were no longer relevant in determining their future financial aid eligibility, suggesting that students are motivated to work harder when programs provide an academic bar.⁴¹ Programs can consider how many students would still remain eligible with the GPA requirement. About 70 percent of current community college students would still remain eligible for programs that aim to set a higher academic standard at a 2.5 GPA, for example.⁴² To ensure students are properly supported when programs set higher academic bars, community colleges can prepare the professors and counselors to provide academic supports needed for a rigorous and supportive learning experience for hard-working students.

- Set an income threshold for student eligibility in an effort to ensure programs are serving the greatest needs in the community.

This design would ensure that investments are devoted towards students who need them the most. Communities can consider adjusting the income threshold based on the financial needs of the community and resources available. ACP, for instance, includes a \$200,000 income threshold, which covers 99 percent of community college students.⁴³

³⁶ Clive Belfield, David Jenkins, and Hana Lahr. *Momentum: the Academic and Economic Value of a 15-Credit First-Semester Course Load for College Students in Tennessee*. Community College Research Center, June 2016. <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/momentum-15-credit-course-load.html>.

³⁷ 34 CFR 668.34 (C average provision at section 668.34(a)(4)(ii)).

³⁸ Barrow, et al. *Paying for Performance: The Education Impacts of a Community College Scholarship Program for Low-Income Adults*. N.p., 2014. Web. <https://chicagofed.org/~media/publications/working-papers/2009/wp2009-13-pdf.pdf>; Heather MacDonald, et al. *Final Impacts Report: Foundations for Success*. Rep. Ottawa, Ontario: R.A. Malatest & Associates, 2009. Print.

³⁹ *Performance-Based Scholarship Demonstration: Project Overview*. Rep. MDRC, n.d. Web. <http://www.mdrc.org/project/performance-based-scholarship-demonstration>.

⁴⁰ *Using Financial Aid to Speed Degree Completion: A Look at MDRC's Research*. Rep. MDRC, March 2016. Web. http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/2016_Using_Financial_Aid_to_Speed_Degree_Completion_IFv2.pdf.

⁴¹ Judith Scott-Clayton. *The Shapeless River: Does a Lack of Structure Inhibit Students' Progress at Community Colleges?* Working paper. Community College Research Center, 2011. Web. <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/shapeless-river.pdf>; Barrow, et al. *Paying for Performance: The Education Impacts of a Community College Scholarship Program for Low-Income Adults*. N.p., 2014; Heather MacDonald, et al. *Final Impacts Report: Foundations for Success*. Rep. Ottawa, Ontario: R.A. Malatest & Associates, 2009. Print.

⁴² NPSAS 2012.

⁴³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey, 2012.

Setting eligibility criteria based on income could also help students access more aid by promoting completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which is lowest at community colleges. About 40 percent of community college students do not apply for the FAFSA, even though they are likely to be eligible for financial aid.⁴⁴ The most common reason for FAFSA non-completion is that students did not think they were eligible for aid, rather than complexity of the form.⁴⁵

Particularly for the community college student population, completing the FAFSA can open doors to federal, state, institutional, and private financial aid that can cover the aforementioned un-met need and expenses associated with students' college education, such as academic supplies, living expenses, and transportation. Community college programs that require FAFSA completion have increased the likelihood that students access financial aid for college; Tennessee, for instance, requires FAFSA completion as an eligibility requirement and has achieved the highest year over year increase in FAFSA completion out of any state, and has one of the highest FAFSA completion rates in the country.

To ensure that FAFSA completion is not a barrier for students, increasing counselor outreach and involvement on FAFSA completion and college enrollment can significantly increase in FAFSA completion and college enrollment.⁴⁶ Coupling this income requirement with better FAFSA completion support and advising for students can help ensure students complete the FAFSA successfully and experience the full benefits of accessing the available financial aid.⁴⁷

- Encourage community service or part-time work that complements students' academic experiences.

Currently, over two-thirds of community college students work while enrolled in school, and the average working student works 31 hours per week.⁴⁸ Research suggests that some part-time work experience and/or community service can be beneficial to students if they have access to relevant experiences that supplement their academic programs, often earning more after leaving college, making more professional connections, and developing soft skills.^{49, 50} However, those developing programs should exercise care to ensure that work experiences and community service options add to—but do not detract from—students' learning experiences; some research suggests that when students work more than 15-20 hours a week, they often experience slower academic progress.⁵¹ This

⁴⁴ Jolanta Juskiewicz. *Community College Students and Federal Student Financial Aid: A Primer*. Rep. American Association of Community Colleges, Washington, DC. April 2014. Web. http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Publications/Reports/Documents/CCStudents_A_Primer.pdf

⁴⁵ National Postsecondary Student Aid Study 2011-12.

⁴⁶ E. P. Bettinger, et al. "The Role of Application Assistance and Information in College Decisions: Results from the H&R Block FAFSA Experiment." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 127.3 (2012): 1205-242. Print.

⁴⁷ Judith Scott-Clayton, and Lindsay Page. *Improving College Access in the United States: Barriers and Policy Responses*. Rep. NBER, 2015; Susan Dynarski, and Judith Scott-Clayton. "The Cost of Complexity in Federal Student Aid: Lessons from Optimal Tax Theory and Behavioral Economics." *National Tax Journal* 59.2 (2006): 319-56. Print; Adam M. Lavecchia, Heidi Liu, and Philip Oreopoulos. *Behavioral Economics of Education: Progress and Possibilities*. Rep. no. 8853. Institute of the Study of Labor (IZA), 2015. Web.

⁴⁸ National Postsecondary Student Aid Study. 2012. Powerstats Calculations.

⁴⁹ Anthony P. Carnevale, et al. *Learning While Earning: The New Normal*. Rep. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2015. Web. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Working-Learners-Report.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Audrey Light. "In-School Work Experience and the Returns to Schooling." *Journal of Labor Economics* 19(1): 65-93. 2001; L. Dundes, and J. Marx. "Balancing Work and Academics in College: Why Do Students Working 10 to 19 Hours per Week Excel?" *Journal of College Student Retention* 8.1 (2007): 107-20. Print; Philip M. Gleason. "College Student Employment, Academic Progress, and Postcollege Labor Market Success." *Journal of Student Financial Aid* 23.2 (1993); C. J. Molitor, and D. E. Leigh. (2005). "In-school work experience and the returns to two-year and four-year colleges." *Economics of Education Review*; J. M. Orszag, P. R. Orszag, and D. M. Whitmore. *Learning and Earning: Working in College*. Rep. Upromise, 2001; E.T. Pascarella, et al. "Does work inhibit cognitive development during college?" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 20.2 (1998): 75-93; Jeffrey S. DeSimone. *The Impact of Employment during School on College Student Academic Performance*. Working paper no. 14006. N.p.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2008. Print; C. Kalenkoski, and S. Pabilonia. "Parental transfers, student achievement, and the labor supply of college students." *Journal of Population Economics* 23.2 (2008): 469-496. Print; Ralph Stinebrickner, and Todd R. Stinebrickner. "Understanding Educational Outcomes of Students from Low-Income Families: Evidence from a Liberal Arts College with a Full Tuition Subsidy Program." *University of Wisconsin Press Journal of Human Resources* 38.3 (2003).

⁵¹ Anthony P. Carnevale, et al. *Learning While Earning: The New Normal*. Rep. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2015. Web. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Working-Learners-Report.pdf>.

is especially true for students trying to balance a full academic course load, which may put on-time completion at risk.⁵² One of the benefits of free community college is reducing students' financial obligations, so that there are minimal distractions to learning. This is supported by research, which shows that grant aid reduces the time spent working, allowing students to take more credits and make more rapid progress towards completion.⁵³

College and Program Eligibility Can Include These Provisions:

- Be accredited community and technical colleges that participate in the Title IV, HEA-authorized programs. When relevant to community needs, programs can consider expanding program eligibility to four-year institutions that have proven track records of beneficially serving large populations of students with traditionally low college participation, as ACP does.
- Be either a high-quality program that offers students a chance to earn half of the credit they need for a bachelor's degree; or be an occupational training program with high graduation rates and good employment outcomes.

Studies show that when students make progress in their specific programs within their first two years of enrollment—such as passing three courses early in their college career—they have an increased likelihood of degree completion or transfer increase. Other studies show that students who earned at least eight college credits in their particular program within the first year were significantly more likely to earn a credential and transfer earlier.⁵⁴

- Reform remediation and reduce barriers to enrolling in college-level credit courses.

Nearly two out of three community college students were identified to need additional college preparation, through remedial or developmental math or English courses, before taking college-level courses.⁵⁵ Remediation is even more common among older, lower-income, and minority students.⁵⁶ Despite the high prevalence of remedial courses, they can be expensive, ineffective, and slow students' progress towards completion.^{57, 58}

Sometimes, programs can require remediation for students who do not need them. To identify students who need remediation more accurately, Long Beach City College used multiple measures—such as high school GPA in combination with standardized assessments, taking into consideration students' academic and career goals.⁵⁹ For students who do need remediation, they are more likely to accumulate more credits and earn a degree or certificate when the remedial courses are relevant to their other (subsequent) courses and educational and career interests.⁶⁰ To ensure students do not fall behind from taking remedial courses, schools can adopt paired courses, compressed sequences,

⁵² R. Darolia. "Working (and studying) day and night: Heterogeneous effects of working on the academic performance of full-time and part-time students." *Economics of Education Review* (2014).

⁵³ Katharine Broton, Sara Goldrick-Rab, and Benson, James. "Working for College: the Causal Impacts of Financial Grants on Undergraduate Employment." Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis. 2016. <http://wihopelab.com/publications/Broton-elal-Working-for-College.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins. *What We Know about Guided Pathways*. Rep. Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center, 2015. Web. <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/What-We-Know-Guided-Pathways.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Thomas Bailey. "Challenge and Opportunity: Rethinking the Role and Function of Developmental Education in Community College," *New Directions for Community Colleges* 144 (2009): 11–30. <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/challenge-and-opportunity.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Thomas Bailey, Shanna Jaggars, and Judith Scott-Clayton. "Characterizing the Effectiveness of Developmental Education," 18–27.

⁵⁸ Judith Scott-Clayton, and Lindsay Page. *Improving College Access in the United States: Barriers and Policy Responses*. Working paper no. 21781. National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2015. Web. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21781>.

⁵⁹ Long Beach City College. *Promise Pathways*. Long Beach, CA. <http://www.lbcc.edu/promisepathways/>.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Rutschow, and Emily Schneider. *Unlocking the Gate, What We Know About Improving Developmental Education*. MDRC. June 2011. http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_595.pdf.

and/or co-requisite support courses.⁶¹ Overall, college preparation and a robust P-12 education can be the most effective strategies to reduce remediation, as research consistently shows that enrolling students in college-level courses during high school has significantly increased college-readiness. Stronger partnerships between P-12 and higher education systems can ensure that more students are prepared to succeed in college.

- Support articulation agreements with four-year public institutions of higher education to allow the full transfer of credits, cutting down on redundant courses, and helping students who transfer to a four-year graduate on time.

Although most community college students intend to transfer to a four-year school, fewer than 1 in 5 transferred to a four-year college and earned a bachelor's degree within 6 years.⁶² The low figure is largely explained by the high prevalence of credit loss when transferring from a community college to a four-year institution; only 56 percent of bachelor's degree recipients who studied at a community college saw all of their credits transfer.⁶³ Greater losses of credit during transfer translate into longer time-to-completion and lower chances of ultimately completing a bachelor's degree.⁶⁴ The odds of earning a bachelor's degree are higher when students first earn an associate's degree first.⁶⁵ While the majority of states have policies to transfer core general education courses and guaranteed admissions policies, policymakers can ensure that those policies are implemented to ensure progression to a bachelor's degree, as well as increase the use of common course numbering between community colleges and four-year colleges.⁶⁶ Advisors who are helping community college students select a four-year school can 1) create transfer program maps that clearly show course sequences, prerequisites, and other requirements needed for transfer, and 2) share basic information about different schools' costs, graduation rates, earnings after college, and repayment rates—which are all available on the [College Scorecard](#)—so that students can pursue a rigorous education and relevant degree.⁶⁷

- Provide evidence-based support services such as mentorships, course-advising, and career-counseling, particularly for non-traditional students, academically underprepared students, and students with limited English proficiency.

Students are more likely to succeed when they are well supported and have clear direction on the pathway to degree completion. Wrap-around supports and clear academic requirements, such as CUNY's ASAP model, can include: comprehensive academic, financial, and career advising; clear messages that students should expect to graduate within on time and take any necessary developmental courses early; and scholarships that cover tuition and transportation. Programs can

⁶¹ Shanna Smith Jaggars, Michelle Hodara, Sung-Woo Cho, and Di Xu, "Three Accelerated Developmental Education Programs: Features, Student Outcomes, and Implications," *Community College Review* 43 no. 1 (January 2015): 3–26.

⁶² D. Jenkins, and J. E. Fink. (2016). *Tracking Transfer: New measures of institutional and state effectiveness in helping community college students attain bachelor's degrees*. New York, NY: Community College Research Center, The Aspen Institute, and National Student Clearinghouse Research Center; Bailey, et al. *What We Know About Transfer*. Community College Research Center. 2015.

<http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/what-we-know-about-transfer.pdf>; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003-04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:04/09).

⁶³ National Postsecondary Student Aid Study. 2012. Powerstats Calculations.

⁶⁴ David Monaghan, and Paul Attewell. *The Community College Route to the Bachelor's Degree*. Rep. Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis, March 18, 2014. Web.

<http://epa.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/02/28/0162373714521865.full.pdf+html?ikey=m8EKj850s9SvE&keytype=ref&siteid=spepa>.

⁶⁵ D. Crook, C. C. Chellman, and A. Holod. *Does earning an associate degree lead to better baccalaureate outcomes for transfer students?* (Working Paper). New York, NY: CUNY Office of Policy Research (2012).

⁶⁶ Education Commission of the States. *Transfer and Articulation – All State Profiles*. April 2016.

<http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbprofallrta?Rep=TA16STA>.

⁶⁷ Joshua Wyner, K. C. Deane, David Jenkins, and John Fink. *The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-year Colleges*. Community College Research Center and The Aspen Institute (2016).

https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/docs/pubs/aspen-ccrc_transferplaybook_05-2016.pdf.

also consider times and modes of delivery that are more responsive to student needs, such as hosting weekend advising or through networks of students with whom they often engage. More than doubling the likelihood of graduation, this program is among the most successful reform strategies to increase student success and college performance. Other efforts at LaGuardia and Cuyahoga Community Colleges show that connecting students to public benefits, to better access food, health care, and housing, can increase retention and completion.⁶⁸ Research also affirms that student support from peers plays an important role, especially in helping students feel socially and academically integrated. A study on the Tennessee Promise program showed how mentoring coupled with last-dollar scholarship money increased the likelihood of college enrollment by 500 percent. Mentors can also increase students' persistence, promoting degree completion.⁶⁹

- Build partnerships with employers, who can invest financial, academic resources, or other learning opportunities—such as equipment and instructors—in the program, provide feedback to ensure curricula are career-relevant, offer internship opportunities, and hire program graduates.

Evidence shows that when schools, employers and workforce groups work together, they can all benefit. Sectoral training strategies—which include partnerships of schools, workforce systems, and employers— can provide more relevant and better integrated education and training, student supports, and job placement assistance. Evaluations of these sectoral strategies have found significantly higher earnings, employment rates, and more appropriate work hours for the participants.⁷⁰ Overall, some level of relevant employer involvement with the curriculum can be beneficial for students; one study suggests that when employers help with course design and delivery, graduates are more likely to find a job that corresponds well to their college degree.⁷¹ Other surveys and studies show that education and employer partnerships have increased productivity, reduced turnover, and increased customer satisfaction.⁷²

4. Develop a Sustainable Funding Model

First-Dollar or Last-Dollar Scholarship

- The financial impact of free community college programs is largely determined by whether additional financial aid is provided before or after students use the existing aid for which they are eligible. A first-dollar program like the President's ACP plan covers tuition and fees before students use up their financial aid, allowing students to shift any additional aid they receive to cover other remaining educational expenses, which often represent the greatest bulk of cost of attendance. A last-dollar program, alternatively, covers the unmet need on students' tuition and fees to reduce the figure to zero.
- While the average community college tuition and fees is around \$3,000, other educational expenses make up more of students' and families' college costs. With academic supplies and living costs,

⁶⁸ Gail Baksh-Jarrett, and Amy-Ellen Duke Benfield. "Integrating Public Benefits into Campus Services and Financial Aid to Facilitate College Completion." NASFAA Conference; Session 230.

⁶⁹ Gloria Crisp. "The Impact of Mentoring on the Success of Community College Students." *The Review of Higher Education* 34.1 2010: 39-60. Project MUSE. Web.

⁷⁰ B. S. Barnow, and S. Spaulding. "Employer Involvement in Workforce Programs," in C.V. Horn, T. Edwards, and T. Greene (Eds). *Transforming U.S. Workforce Development Policies for the 21st Century* (pp. 231-263). 2015. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research). S. Maguire, J. Freely, C. Clymer, M. Conway, and D. Schwartz. *Tuning In to Local Labor Markets: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures. 2010.

⁷¹ Geoff Mason, Gareth Williams, and Sue Cranmer. "Employability skills initiatives in higher education: what effects do they have on graduate labour market outcomes? 2009. *Education Economics*." *Journal of Education Economics*. 2009. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09645290802028315>.

⁷² Lindsey Woolsey, and Garrett Groves. *State Sector Strategies Coming of Age: Implications for State Workforce Policy Makers*. 2013.

some sources estimate the full cost of attendance to surpass \$10,000.⁷³ In 2011-2012, the estimated cost that the typical student and family would need to cover out of pocket was over \$8,000.⁷⁴ The Pell Grant can be used to cover any costs associated with attending college. Although the maximum Pell Grant has increased by over \$1,000 since 2008, it covers about 60 percent of the cost of attending community college, whereas decades earlier it covered those costs entirely.⁷⁵

- First-dollar programs will be able to leverage and invest more and new dollars into community colleges to address the neediest students' cost barriers while also providing the funding needed to implement reforms to increase student success. Programs may be able to serve more students, however, through last-dollar scholarships, if financial resources are scarce, and may be able to point to research showing that even a few hundred dollars' worth of scholarships can increase college enrollment and completion. In some cases, last-dollar scholarships may be able to cover all eligible students. Those designing Promise programs need to weigh the depth versus scale of impact given the resources available.

Sample Financing Mechanisms

- For most of the free community college programs that were announced and modeled after the President's America's College Promise plan, the annual costs of the programs were estimated to be less than \$3,000 per student.
- While state community college programs are funded through various mechanisms, from state appropriations to budget allocations to private donations, generally appropriations play an important role in financing state-wide programs while local donations commonly fund regional and institutional programs. To hedge against any risk in year-to-year budget fluctuations, some programs have established endowments, which can support more long-term financial planning.
- Tennessee—one of the earliest state-wide free community college program—established an endowment through net lottery proceeds, budget reallocations, and state funding.
- Chicago—the first city-wide free community college program—secured \$10 million in funding by reallocating program funding within its budget.

⁷³ Sara Goldrick-Rab, and Natalie Kendall. *F2CO, Redefining College Affordability: Securing America's Future with a Free Two Year College Option*. Lumina Foundation. April 2014. http://wihopelab.com/publications/Redefining_College_Affordability.pdf.

⁷⁴ National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2012.

⁷⁵ Sara Goldrick-Rab, and Natalie Kendall. *F2CO, Redefining College Affordability: Securing America's Future with a Free Two Year College Option*. Lumina Foundation. April 2014. http://wihopelab.com/publications/Redefining_College_Affordability.pdf.

	Program Type	Annual Program Cost (\$ Millions)	Students Served Annually	Annual Cost per Student	Financing Mechanism
State	Tennessee	\$15.0	16,000	\$938	State funding, primarily from net lottery proceeds and budget reallocations
	Oregon	\$10.0	10,000	\$100	State funding
	Minnesota	\$8.5	1,600	\$5,313	State funding
Local	Chicago Promise	\$2.0	3,000	\$667	Budget reallocation from cuts and consolidation
	Garrett County Scholarship	\$0.4	162	\$1,271	County
	Oakland Promise	\$35.0	20,000	\$1,750	Donors
Community College	Harper College	\$0.6	220	\$2,727	Donors
	Gateway Promise	\$0.7	1,700	\$412	Business investment
	Community College of Philadelphia	\$0.2	440	\$450	Donors

5. Evaluate and Assess Program Effectiveness to Learn What Works for Continuous Improvement

Building a feedback loop can help ensure that Promise programs continue to improve and strive toward goals of helping students access an affordable college education and graduating more students prepared to pursue careers and any additional educational goals. Program evaluation and assessment can assist in determining whether the programs are addressing identified community needs, and inform any necessary design adjustments. Strong research designs and partnerships with academic researchers can help communities build evidence on what works can help sustain these programs, identify best practices to inform other communities' program design, and scale what works. Assessments and evaluations should also ensure that the programs are serving all students, particularly those who have been historically marginalized, so evaluators may consider disaggregating results by groups of students, such as by income, age, race, ethnicity, and family background. Programs' evaluations and assessments can consider the following questions.

Student Outcomes

- Are more (groups of) students graduating high school college-ready and enrolling in college?
- Where are students enrolling in college? How do these programs affect enrollment patterns at both community colleges and four-year colleges?
- Are more (groups of) students completing the FAFSA and accessing the financial aid for which they are eligible?
- Are fewer (groups of) students taking remedial classes in college?
- Are more (groups of) students placed in developmental education accelerating through those requirements?
- During college, are more (groups of) students able to supplement their learning by participating in relevant extracurricular activities, internships, or other experiences?
- During college, are more (groups of) students able to access the supports and resources necessary to focus on academics?
- During college, are (groups of) students accumulating more credits?
- Are more (groups of) students graduating on time with high-quality associate degrees, and/or transferring credits to a four-year institution where they graduate with bachelor's degrees?
- Are more (groups of) students becoming employed in jobs that provide good wages and benefits?
- Are more (groups of) students repaying their student loans successfully?

Community Outcomes and Program Implementation

- Is the region in which the community college is located filling more jobs?
- What kinds of meaningful partnerships are community stakeholders building with the school? Do residents engage more with the school?
- How are policymakers taking note of and responding to the college's successes and needs?
- Among eligible students, what is the take-up rate for the scholarship?
- How much of the cost of attendance are financial aid dollars covering for participating students?
- What are annual per-student costs for the program?

More information about an evaluation framework and metrics to consider across the K-12 and higher education systems can be found [here](#).

Free Community College Cases and Models

State-wide Program: Tennessee

“With the idea of eliminating the barriers keeping Tennessee students from entering the post-secondary pipeline, Tennessee Promise provides a last-dollar scholarship with mentor support to our state’s high school seniors. It sends the message to students and families that college is within everyone’s reach regardless of zip code or socio-economic background. It also communicates to business and industry that Tennessee is intensely focused on creating the workforce to meet their demands.” – Randy Boyd, Commissioner of Economic and Community Development in Tennessee.

- *Tennessee Promise Today:* Today, the Tennessee Promise serves over 16,000 students, contributing to a 10 percent increase in public higher education enrollment and a 25 percent increase in enrollment at community colleges. Tennessee has the highest year-over-year gain in the percentage of graduating high school students who filed the FAFSA, and accounted for more than 40 percent of the increase in such FAFSAs completed across the entire country, according to

recent analysis.⁷⁶ Since 2008, students have given back more than 740,000 community service hours. Tennessee Promise has also reformed remediation by providing co-requisite enrollment, with 93 percent of its students either testing out of or improving their entry scores, which can save students and the state millions of dollars and connected students with mentors who can provide personalized support. Participating students have the support of tnAchieves, which supports them through their post-secondary education with weekly communication, focus groups, and other resources. In its first year, the program cost \$15 million, which is less than \$1,000 per student. According to tnAchieves, reaching opportunity youth in Tennessee relied upon consistent communication, clearly-defined pathways, and local mentorship.

- *Why Tennessee Promise:* In 2008, tnAchieves—a predecessor of the Promise program--was formed and launched in Knox County to offer universal, last-dollar community and technical college scholarships. Tennessee's college attainment rate was 33 percent, and there were at least one million Tennesseans who already earned college credit but lacked a degree or credential. The organization's vision was to ensure that every student had a fair shot at earning a postsecondary education. These scholarships opened the doors to college for many students who would not have otherwise attended: 65 percent of its students were the first in their families to attend college and 70 percent came from families earning less than \$50,000 annually. Building on the success of tnAchieves, Tennessee Promise became the central college access and completion strategy in the Governor's "Drive to 55" campaign to increase the state's college attainment rate to 55 percent by 2025.
- *How Tennessee Promise Got Started:* In 2008, knoxAchieves was founded in Knox County with the support of its mayor. In its first cohort, the scholarships served 493 students, by raising private funds for last-dollar scholarships. Data showed that tnAchieves' students had college retention rates that were 50 percent greater than the state average, and college completion rates were three times the state average. Given its success, 27 counties adopted the program to expand eligibility to nearly half of Tennessee's population in 2014. tnAchieves had collected six years of data and student stories to demonstrate the unprecedented increase of 4.6 in college-going and the overall positive impact. One year later, Tennessee adopted the program state-wide in 85 counties, through a partnership with tnAchieves.
- *Financing and Partnerships:* The Governor's office established a specific position to lead college completion efforts in partnership with tnAchieves, and established 85 county-based advisory councils comprised of local higher education, secondary education, and business leaders as well as public officials, to ensure local ownership and sustainability. Carrying out its vision that everyone can play a role in making Tennessee Promise and students' educational experiences successful, tnAchieves recruits and trains over 9,000 volunteer mentors annually (up from 176 in 2009) who support students in completing the FAFSA and filling out college applications, and who can offer advice on the overall college experience. Local advisory councils can offer advice in the mentoring recruitment and training process. In 2015, 35 percent of those mentors came from business and industry, and many others come from a range of organizations with varying missions including civic clubs (e.g., Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions Clubs), engineering and hospital associations, hospitality associations, and retirees.
- In 2014, the state passed legislation to create the Tennessee Promise, funded by a state-managed endowment and a special reserve account. After some negotiations that included shifting funding from the HOPE scholarship for four-year students, Tennessee established a \$360 million

⁷⁶ Analysis by Chad Aldeman, Bellwether Education Partners, <http://aheadoftheheard.org/on-college-signing-day-a-look-at-fafsa-completion-rates/>

endowment that comes primarily from 1) total unexpended lottery scholarship revenues from the previous 10 years (approximately \$312 million) and 2) a transfer of \$47 million from Tennessee Student Assistant Corporation's student loan guaranty operating reserve. The Promise program's sustainability model included long-term endowment earnings of 4 percent, yielding approximately \$7.2 million on an annual basis. Funding for the special reserve, the other component of the program's funding, is derived from the following sources: 1) interest earnings from the Promise endowment; 2) total annual net lottery proceeds (i.e., lottery revenues in excess of expenditures on scholarships and TELS administration); and 3) interest earnings on the special reserve. The special reserve is invested in similar long-term instruments such as the endowment, yielding a similar rate of return.

City-wide Program: Boston

- *“The single most effective way to break down the social and financial barriers facing many families is to make post-secondary education free and accessible. In Boston, I am so proud that we launched our tuition-free community college program for Boston Public School graduates. I encourage other cities to commit to a similar program, and give all talented graduates another resource for success.” – Martin J. Walsh, Mayor of Boston.*
- *Boston Community College Promise today:* In April 2016, Mayor Martin Walsh announced a tuition-free community college plan to eliminate barriers to a college degree, and to address the economic disparities in Boston. Within just two months of opening the application period for the Boston free community college program in June 2016, the two eligible Boston community colleges have already enrolled 77 students. The Mayor's office expects an annual cost of \$250,000-\$600,000 to serve up to 400 students annually, and intends to expand to other community colleges in the city. Starting in late Fall of 2016, the program will launch an integrated model of support services, bridge programs, dual enrollment, remedial classes, and resources that will connect students with employment opportunities, career navigation services, and financial aid advising. To be eligible, students must be graduates of Boston Public Schools (BPS), be Pell-eligible for a federal Pell Grant, earn at least a 2.0 GPA while enrolled in college, and complete community college within three years.
- *Why Boston Community College Promise:* The Mayor commissioned a workforce assessment, which identified economic disparities within Boston, particularly in employment outcomes. For instance, some neighborhoods—like East Boston, Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan—had unemployment rates that were three times as high as Boston's unemployment rate. Among those who were unemployed, a disproportionate number lacked a college degree. In Massachusetts, 71 percent of the job openings will require some form of postsecondary education or vocational certificate training, and in Boston, by 2020, 41 percent of the job openings will require at least a bachelor's degree. The City of Boston recognized that earning a college degree was the surest way to access the middle class and ensure a qualified workforce to meet the city's economic needs. The Mayor's office identified free community college as a more cost-effective strategy than conventional skills training programs. For instance, a free community college program would also be a way of leveraging *already existing* systems and resources to expand college opportunity, help students access financial aid to make college more affordable, and to make the investments necessary to increase student success.
- *How Boston Community College Promise Got Started:* Shortly after the assessment of Boston's workforce, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development, Boston Public Schools, and the City's Neighborhood Jobs Trust consulted with stakeholders and workforce partners; these conversations reinforced the data, which showed that investments in state schools and community

colleges could have the greatest impact. These schools already had a low marginal cost per student, open seats, and lower overhead costs. To design the program, the Mayor's office consulted the President's America's College Promise proposal, the Tennessee framework, and other similar programs around the country, and broadened the student and program eligibility criteria based on financial resources. This program initially launched to cover eligible students' tuition at Bunker Hill Community College and Roxbury Community College, which serve communities where some of the economic and educational disparities are most severe.

- *Financing and Partnerships:* The Boston Community College Promise is financed through a linkage program, the City's Neighborhood Jobs Trust (NJT), operated by the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (OWD). The NJT collects developer fees from large-scale commercial developments in the city, which fund the free community college program. Prior to launching, the Mayor's office developed partnerships with existing organizations to develop support systems so that students are able to complete community college. Most of these partnerships include nonprofit organizations that help students complete FAFSAs, prepare for the state exam to get into community colleges, and successfully complete college.

Urban Community College: Long Beach College Promise

"The Long Beach College Promise has been an essential catalyst for improving student success in the greater Long Beach area. Strengthening the partnership between Long Beach Unified School District, Long Beach City College, Cal State University, Long Beach and the City of Long Beach has reaped tremendous benefits for our students and community. Offering a one-year tuition free experience to all local area high school graduates has helped transform the greater Long Beach community and created a college going culture among historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged communities." – Eloy Oakley, Chancellor-designate, California Community Colleges and Superintendent-President of the Long Beach Community College District

- *Long Beach College Promise Today:* The Long Beach College Promise focuses on building a culture of education in the community, in addition to emphasizing college preparation, access, and success. Students are exposed to the possibility of college as early as fourth grade. Long Beach College Promise measures its success by progress in the overall school system and community. With a 500 percent increase in high school students completing college-level English courses and a 200 percent increase in college-level math completion during high school, nearly 90 percent of LBUSD graduates enroll in college within two years and are better prepared for college-level courses. About 8,000 students have benefited so far from one year of free community college. Transfer rates from the LBCC to CSULB were 18 percent higher than that of other community colleges, and graduation rates at CSULB are currently above 65 percent, the highest in the CSU System. Other communities in California, including Sacramento and San Francisco, have used the Long Beach College Promise as a model for their partnerships.
- *Why Long Beach College Promise:* In the mid-1990s, scale backs in the Long Beach aerospace industry and naval shipyard closures led to thousands of job losses. This economic downturn accompanied a demographic shift, with higher poverty rates in the region and a weaker college-going culture. The community determined that offering more residents a chance to access and succeed through a quality education could also assist in transforming the community of Long Beach. However, key barriers—namely, finances and poor college preparation—were preventing too many prospective students from enrolling in college. The Long Beach community saw the Promise program as a solution that would help more residents develop the knowledge and skills

needed to strengthen the local economy, while the community also worked to provide the investments necessary to reform college preparation and ensure students can succeed in a rigorous academic environment from pre-school through college.

- *How the Long Beach College Promise Got Started:* The community—particularly local education leaders, the Mayor’s office, and civic leaders—came together to identify local barriers and assess the needs and experiences of their students. In particular, Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), Long Beach City College (LBCC), and California State University-Long Beach (CSULB), were key partners that helped identify the need to support students from pre-K to college completion, and to bridge the gap between students and the local workforce. From there, Long Beach identified stakeholders who would build a small, strong, committed coalition under a focused set of objectives. In 2008, the partners signed the Long Beach College Promise, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that established a formal relationship with clear goals. The partners credit the MOU with sustaining the work according to their original vision and standards.
- *Financing and Partnerships:* Long Beach College Promise was created in the midst of a recession, so it was challenging to find any new major funding sources. Rather than waiting for an endowment or foundation to offer funding, Long Beach began by reallocating existing resources and funding, and as needed, sought flexibility around the use of funds within programs in which they were already participating. This strategy sustained the Long Beach College Promise for six years. Finally, in 2014, Long Beach College Promise received its first funding from outside resources when the Governor launched a \$50-million statewide prize for innovation in higher education. Altogether, the Long Beach College Promise raised more than \$6 million from its local foundation for a free year of tuition along with a \$5-million award for innovation from the state to continue the work of the Promise. The Long Beach College Promise continues to rely on evidence of progress to make the case for support moving forward.

Rural Community College: Dabney Promise

“It became increasingly clear to our leadership that our strategic goals would never be fully met unless we worked to ensure that the ability to enroll in DSLCC would be available to everyone. There were still barriers for many who needed us the most; the Dabney Promise means that all who seek post-secondary education and training will truly now be able to do so.” – John Rainone, President of Dabney S. Lancaster Community College

- *Dabney Promise Today:* The DSLCC Educational Foundation administers the Dabney Promise and continues to raise funds for the scholarship. This year, the Dabney Promise is prepared to start its pilot program for about 50 students, including adult and continuing students. Key features include students enrolling at least three-quarters of the full-time requirement to promote persistence and on-time completion, and requiring them to complete at least four hours of community service annually to give back to the community that helped finance a portion of their higher education costs.
- *Why Dabney Promise:* Following the entry of new leadership at Dabney S. Lancaster Community College (DSLCC), located in rural Virginia, the institution held a dozen community forums to help leaders better understand urgent local needs and to build trust. As the “community’s college,” DSLCC leadership saw an opportunity to bring a range of stakeholders to the table to solve the most pressing concerns. High on the list of issues to address was the area’s low educational attainment rate—24 percentage points below that of other areas in Virginia. Community members shared that tuition costs, even after financial aid, presented a key barrier

that prevented youth and adult learners from even considering higher education. The Dabney Promise was established to open the doors to a college education for those who would not attend otherwise.

- *How Dabney Promise Got Started:* When President Obama announced ACP in January 2015, DSLCC was in the beginning stages of a fundraising campaign for tuition scholarships. By naming the program Dabney Promise, the college emphasized its connection to a national movement and conversation. After assessing local needs, DSLCC leaders began modeling the design on ACP, using other best practices throughout the nation. Along the way, DSLCC worked closely with its financial aid office to set up a last-dollar program, and to ensure that support services were in place to increase FAFSA completion by a greater number of students.
- *Financing and Partnerships:* To promote college preparedness, DSLCC focused on building strong partnerships with six high schools, which have helped to increase the number of students enrolled in dual enrollment programs by 30 percent, to about 600 students. Based on what DSLCC learned from the listening sessions and its own data, it developed a case statement for the Dabney Promise, highlighting the out-of-pocket costs that remain for students and families even after receiving maximum financial aid available to them. In all situations asking for individual, institutional, and employer support, a focus was placed upon the need to increase educational attainment for a stronger workforce, supporting the development of knowledge and skill-sets that business and industries identified as essential. Given its location in a rural setting, DSLCC relied on local donors, and built the Promise into its annual fundraising campaign. Altogether, the campaign attracted 400 donors, which doubled the record number of donors throughout DSLCC's 53-year history. Donors even included municipalities that wanted to help support increased educational opportunities for local residents.

Employer-Community College Partnership Cases and Models

In the following models, community colleges partnered with employers to expand and improve education and career training programs that help job seekers develop the skills they need for in-demand jobs in industries such as information technology, health care, energy, and advanced manufacturing. These partnerships were formed under the Federal Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) program, which has served more than half of our nation's community colleges.

Alpena Community College: Michigan

- Alpena Community College (ACC) received \$2.8 million to implement the "Sustainable Solutions for Northeast Michigan: Green Jobs and Clean Energy" project to build a statewide energy partnership network, which included the Michigan National Guard and DTE Energy and Consumers Energy, the two largest energy employers in Michigan, as well as the state workforce development board. This partnership network designed and implemented a "Gas Energy Bootcamp," targeting unemployed and returning veterans. Local 223 of the Utility Workers Union of America had a role in curriculum planning and hands-on training delivery, and DTE Energy provided approximately \$60,000 in private funding to support housing and feeding the trainees at Camp Grayling for the entire eight-week duration of the course. In its last quarter alone, Alpena reported 20 employers seeking interviews with or hiring program graduates. Overall, Alpena served 420 students, of whom 379 completed at least one program of study. Of the 193 completers who were not working when they entered the program, 186 students entered

employment, giving Alpena a 96 percent employment rate. Of the 186 completers who were already working at entry, 72 percent had wage increases.

Collin County Community College District: Texas

- Collin County Community College and six other colleges from six states (Arizona, Illinois, Massachusetts, Texas, Utah, and Washington) received \$20 million to develop and enhance, with deep employer engagement, more than 100 curriculum and training modules and 250 virtual laboratory exercises in four information technology (IT) specialty areas: programming, networking, cybersecurity, and geospatial technologies. The seven institutions partnered with some of the nation's leading information technology employers to form the National Information, Security, Geospatial, and Information Technologies (NISGTC) consortium. With the leadership of Cisco, Dell, ADT Security, IBM, Microsoft, AT&T, Lockheed Martin and others, NISGTC established four national Business and Industry Leadership Teams (BILT) comprised of representatives from more than 200 companies in nine states and the District of Columbia. The employer leadership of the BILTs includes high-level corporate management, and the colleges' engagement in the Leadership Teams far exceeds that of typical business advisory councils. Each of the four BILTs met separately and worked closely with college faculty and program staff to offer guidance. Based on the direct input from these employers, BILT members collaborated with community college educators to re-design curricula and training modules, as well as certificate and degree programs, ensuring that participants would obtain the skills necessary for successful careers in the four IT specialties.



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